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Speech to the Daughters of the Confederate Veterans

Winfield Scott Featherston (1819-1891)

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Members of Edward Cary Walthall Chapter United

Daughters of the Confederate Veterans & Gentlemen:

Within the limited time allotted me we can hope to take but a cursory view of the magnificent
Thunberg and Gentlemen: we are to consider, volumes have been written & spoken upon it, but it only seems to grow brighter as we become more familiar with it.
When approaching the harbor of New

York City we see a magnificent statue rearing its head towards the blue vaults of heaven reaching far above the surrounding edifices. This statue representing the goddess of Liberty welcoming all to our country standing there in its lofty grandeur as a silent messenger symbolical of man's conception of the highest form of civil government fashioned after the form of woman beautiful in its symmetry and perfect in its proportion as it is possible for human art to make it, we are not surprised that it is world-renowned. Thus from the undulating plains of modern history rises the life and character of Robert Edward Lee magnificent in the grandeur of his achievements as the chief of a band of patriots battling ^{for the} principles of self-government beautiful in the symmetry of an irreproachable private life and crowned with the glory of Christian virtue.

I would indeed be weak did I not fully realize my own inability to rise to the height of the duty you have seen fit to assign me, and I would but be displaying my own weakness to accept your kind invitation upon this occasion as a personal compliment and I should not venture to do so. But as the son of a Confederate soldier and a representative of W. S. Featherstone camp of Sons of Confederate Veterans I deem it a sacred duty at all times, and by all means in my power to pay homage to the life and character, and honor to the memory of the great leader of the forces of the Lost Cause, and the gallant band of heroes who followed him. While my humble efforts may seem weak and feeble in comparison with others more gifted let me hope

2

they will be received in the spirit in which they are made
They come from a heart full of reverence for the memory of
those who followed the flag of the Confederacy, although the
flag was furled and the gallant band outnumbered and crushed,
they left to us their descendents a rich heritage in their
sacrifice and heroic deeds, which dim not with the ^{corroding} ~~growing~~ touch
of time but as the principles for which they fought is more
thoroughly understood, and the righteousness of their cause
acknowledged history becomes impartial and they grow brighter
and brighter astonishing the world by the very magnificence
of their grandeur

Never hand
Waved sword from stain so free;
Nor purer sword led a braver hand;
Nor a braver bled for a brighter land;
Nor a brighter land had a cause so grand;
Nor a cause a chief like Lee.

Robert Edward Lee was the embodiment of all that was
pure noble and true. The difficulty which confronts us when
we consider the life and character of Lee is its perfection;
complete in the equipoise of his makeup perfect in the sym-
metry of his character. As a military genius ancient nor modern
history furnish his equal. He had the genius of the great gen-
erals of the world without their weaknesses. Read the achieve-
ments of Caesar, Hannibal, Alexander, Napoleon and Wellington the
great captains of the world and compare them with those of Lee,
and you will find that he is not only their peer but excels all
Perhaps Gen. Lee's long defensive campaign against Gen. Grant
may be considered his greatest military achievement; with 45,000
ragged rebels month after month he held in check and prevented
the approach to the capital of the Confederacy a force quadru-
ple in numbers. I assert without fear of successful contradict-

those who followed the list of the Confederate supporters the
great come from a heart full of reverence for the memory of
great will be received in the spirit in which they are made

ion that this campaign alone makes him the greatest of all mil-
itary geniuses. Wellington once asserted that defensive camp-
aigns require sagacious patience as well as other strong qual-
ities, and thought Napoleon lacked this element of a great leader
When hunger and cold aid the enemy as was the case with Lee
and his patriotic band endurance then indeed becomes heroic
Wellington says of Napoleon's defence of Paris in 1814;

"Excellent, quite excellent, the study of it has given
me a greater idea of his genius."

Yet in two months the Allies captured Paris although defended
by the great military genius of Napoleon with his splendid army.
When we consider that the disproportion between the French and
the forces of the Allies was no greater than that existing be-
tween the armies of Lee and Grant we are astonished at the en-
durance of the troops which sustained the severe and repeated
assaults of the enemy. By his magnificent military genius he
anticipated every move of the enemy and successfully thrust the
ragged rebels between him and Richmond extracting a terrible
price in blood for every attempt to advance until exhausted by
their own exertions in resisting a powerful enemy for nine
long months with ranks decimated for want of the actual necessi-
ties of life he finally succumbed to the inevitable. Reverse
the order and place Grant the successful Union leader in Lee's
position with 45000 troops and give Lee a 140,000 ^{Confederate} soldiers with
which to confront him and can anyone with the most vivid imag-
ination claim that he could have held that line for nine months.
An able writer comparing the military achievements of Lee with
those of Wellington said "As compared with those of Gen. Lee
they seem, including even Waterloo absolutely insignificant,"
and the same writer ~~in the same article~~ shows that in one bat-

ability of his...
The will of Northern Virginia and pressed into its ranks the
of Waterloo. The coming of Lee was a southern soldier created
in killed and the loss of both armies in the battle
the Lee effected a loss with an interior force when the ene-

even touch his garments. He was gentle and modest, his orders of-
ten being more of a suggestion than a command. He blamed him-
self for mistakes but never found fault with others. He was
magnanimous, assuming the responsibility of defeat but accord-
ing the glory of victory to his officers and men. As a citizen
he was obedient to ^{law} authority bowing to the commands of civil
authority. His private life was as his public without a stain.
His crowning glory was his Christianity; ^{Character} it was the basis upon
which all else rested, it was the source of his strength, the
law of his life, the guide for his every act, and the support
upon which he leaned in every trial. A country which has given
birth to men like him can look the chivalry of the world in the
face without shame for never did country produce a more valiant
soldier or nobler Christian gentleman.

"His grandeur he derived from heaven alone,
For he was great ere fortune made him so;
And wars like mists that rise against the sun,
Made him but greater seen, not greater grow.

His ashes in a peaceful urn shall rest;
His name a great example stand to show,
How strangely high endeavors may be blessed,
Where piety and valor jointly go.